

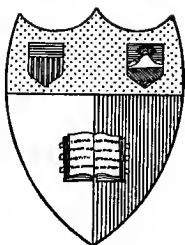
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Four Centuries
of
GREEK LEARNING
IN
ENGLAND

Inaugural Lecture delivered
before the University of Oxford on
8 March 1894

By
INGRAM BYWATER

Regius Professor of Greek

1893-1908

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BYWATER'S Inaugural Lecture was not printed in his lifetime ; it was not included in the list of his writings which he gave to the present Rector of Exeter ; and it was believed (e.g. by Dr. Jackson, *Memoir*, p. 129) that it had disappeared. It has recently been found in a collection of his notebooks, and is now in the Bodleian.

The Delegates of the Press while not unmindful of Bywater's views upon the publication of Remains have not been able to persuade themselves that this lecture should remain unpublished. The print follows closely its beautiful original.

FOUR CENTURIES OF GREEK LEARNING IN ENGLAND

It is one of my statutable duties to deliver from time to time a public lecture. This afternoon, when I am coming forward to give my first public address in my new capacity, I cannot doubt that the thoughts of all here present must be once more reverting to the very distinguished man whose position I have been appointed to occupy. We in this place knew him, during the last twenty years of his life, as the Master of a very distinguished College, as one who seemed to us a born ruler and director of men, as a very potent force in this University. We knew him, too, as a scholar of wide interests and large-minded sympathies, as one whom the humanists of a former age would have recognized and honoured as a kindred spirit. And outside the University, the world has known him as a most accomplished translator, as the author of a masterly translation of Plato, which has already taken rank as an English Classic. It is not for me, however, to speak at any length of him or of the mark that he has left on this generation. But there is one thing that I cannot leave unsaid. The living interest in Ancient Philosophy, which has been for many years one of the characteristics of Oxford, was mainly, if not entirely, due to his initiative. All who were privileged to hear his lectures on Plato and the Early Greek Philosophy will, I am sure, agree with me in saying that these lectures of his revealed a new world to us, and enabled us to see that without Greek Philosophy Greek history and literature lose half their meaning.

THE revival of Greek learning in Italy, the great event in the history of the Italian Renaissance, dates from 1396, the year in which the Greek Manuel Chrysoloras came to occupy what we should now call the chair of Greek language and literature at Florence. Greek thus became a part of Italian culture even before the taking of Constantinople by the Turks drove Bessarion and Lascaris and the other Greeks of the dispersion to seek a new home in Italy.

England, the land of Occam, Scotus, and Burley, was slow to feel the influence of the Renaissance : it was not till 1491 that we hear of a public teacher of Greek in an English university. The first signs of new life and awakened interest in the new learning in this country become observable about the middle of the fifteenth century, when the relations, political and social, between England and Italy were becoming closer than they had ever been before. A duke of Urbino received the Garter from our Edward the Fourth : Duke Humphrey filled his library with Italian MSS., and Italian scholars dedicated their works to him just as if he were a Pope or one of the Medici of the day. Caxton's patron, the brilliant and unfortunate Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, passed the years of his retirement from public life in the learned society that he found in Padua, Rome, and elsewhere in Italy. Under these circumstances one cannot be surprised to hear of Englishmen of the scholarly class completing their education in an Italian university. The great teacher of Greek at this time was Guarino, who taught at Ferrara till his death in 1460 ; and in the long list of his more distinguished pupils we find the names of four Oxford men : William Gray, who had been Chancellor of Oxford in 1441 ; Robert Fleming, Dean of Lincoln ; John

Gundorpe ; and John Free, who is known to have taken his Master's degree at Oxford in 1454. Fleming, I may add, was of Lincoln College ; the others were from Balliol, and Gray is still remembered by his College as one of the benefactors of the College Library. Free made himself a reputation as a Greek scholar by a much-admired translation of the *Encomium Calvitii* of Synesius, and he has also been credited with the translation of *Diodorus Siculus* usually attributed to Poggio (Leland, p. 467) and with a version of sundry works of Xenophon (Bale, p. 614). We have no positive evidence as to the Greek attainments of the rest, but Leland tells us that he had seen a Graeco-Latin lexicon compiled by Fleming, and one may still see in the Bodleian a Greek MS. (Laud. Gr. 28) of the Liturgy of St. Basil with notes stating that the MS. had been borrowed by Fleming from Darley Abbey (in Derbyshire) in 1452 and duly returned.

Later on in the century other Englishmen followed the example of these men and turned their steps to Italy to become pupils of Politian and Chalcondyles. One of Politian's pupils was William Tilly or Selling, a monk of Canterbury, whom Leland describes as an ardent collector of Greek books, and whom we may well remember as the man who enabled Linacre to undertake his Italian journey in 1485.

Considering the great obscurity that hangs over the literary history of this period, I may be permitted to point out two or three facts as some indication of the growing interest in Greek learning in this country. In 1474 Demetrius Cantacuzene is in London copying Greek MSS. for English use (Omont : *Fac-similés de MSS. grecs*, 1887, p. 11), just as at a later moment in the century (1495) we find John Serbopulus installed as a regular copyist of Greek MSS. in the Abbey at Reading. And

about the same time, in 1476, we actually find a learned Greek established in London—no less a personage than Andronicus Callistus, one of the Greeks of the dispersion—a man whom his contemporaries regarded as almost the equal of Theodore Gaza, and who claims a place in history not only by his writings but also as the Greek teacher of Politian. Years before this he had been one of Free's friends (Hody, p. 228); and the probability is that he was known to most of the travelled English of the time, either personally or by reputation. As teaching was his profession he must have come here to teach Greek—to do in England what his friend George Hermonymus did for Greek learning in France. He seems, however, to have died very shortly after his arrival,¹ before he had time to produce any effect, and there is not so much as a record of his name in any of our received histories of English learning.

The one man, however, who may claim to have been the first to naturalize Greek studies in England is William Grocyn, the first who undertook to teach Greek in an English university. Grocyn's work in this capacity begins in 1491; but there is some reason to think that even before this there was in Oxford not only an interest in Greek matters but also the possibility of acquiring at any rate some elementary knowledge of the language. The learned Italian humanist Cornelius Vitelli of Corneto, whom Chaundler, Warden of New College, brought over from Italy to teach the new learning in Oxford, was no doubt primarily a Latinist: his contemporary, Bernard André,² describes him as 'facundissimus orator', which practically means a 'master of elegant Latinity', and his one contribution to literature is in a Latin book—an edition of Perotti's *Cornucopiae*.

¹ Lascaris *ap.* Legrand, I, p. lvi, n. 3. ² Vita Henrici VII, p. 56.

At the same time one has to remember that a well-educated Italian scholar of this period could hardly be without some tincture of Greek; and if he knew any Greek it is hardly likely that Grocyn, Linacre, and the rest would allow him to keep it to himself. There is distinct evidence¹ in the case of Grocyn that he had acquired the rudiments of Greek before he started for Italy, and it is a reasonable conjecture at any rate that he may have owed this to his Italian friend, Cornelius Vitelli.

Grocyn was a middle-aged man when he at length made the Italian journey and joined the throng that crowded the class-rooms of Politian and Chalcondyles. On his return in 1490 he began a new life as a teacher of Greek in Oxford. The Register of Exeter College shows that instead of taking up his abode in Magdalen or New College he now rented rooms in Exeter; and I hope I may be permitted to retain my faith in the tradition that the first regular teaching of Greek in the University was within the walls of this College. In this work of teaching he had before long associated with him two younger men, Linacre and Latimer. Linacre, the learned physician, is the first considerable name in the history of English classical learning. Grocyn's energies were absorbed in teaching; whereas Linacre, in spite of professional and official demands on his time, was able to give to the world a great deal of Galen and Proclus on the Sphere in a Latin form, so admirable that his contemporaries exhaust the language of eulogy in their admiration of it, and it is said that he had prepared a translation of a third of Aristotle in the hope that Grocyn and Latimer would fulfil their promise to finish the rest.

In this way then, in the last years of the fifteenth century, Oxford had, for the first time in history, a school

¹ Latimer, quoted by Burrows, p. 346.

of Greek—a school of such distinction that Erasmus is able to say, with perhaps some little friendly overstatement, that it was now no longer necessary to cross the Alps to learn Greek as there were men in Oxford quite as well able to teach it as the Italians.

The fame of this Oxford school attracted Richard Croke from Cambridge, and thus a pupil of Grocyn eventually became, in 1518, the first public reader in Greek in the sister University.

The introduction, however, of Greek at Cambridge is mainly due to Erasmus, who taught there—according to his own account, with little encouragement or success—in 1511 during his third sojourn in England. About this time the significance of the movement in the direction of the new learning is attested by the vigorous opposition it had to face from the obscurantist parties in the Universities. The obscurantists—the Trojans, as they preferred to call themselves—had good reason to hate the new studies, since Greek was not only a newfangled thing but also, what was even worse, the language of a schismatic church and people. The reply to all this takes a concrete form in the foundation in 1516 of a new Oxford college, consecrated from the first to the advancement of the new learning. Corpus Christi College is, like the great schools recently founded at Rome, Louvain, and Paris, designed by statute to be a *Collegium trilingue*—an institution for the study of the three languages of all sacred and secular learning—Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. The Corpus Reader in Theology is in his interpretations of scripture to follow as far as possible ‘the holy and ancient doctors, both Latin and Greek, and especially Jerome, Austin, Ambrose, Origen, Hilary, Chrysostom, Damascenus, and others of that sort’:¹ the Corpus Reader in Greek,

¹ Ward’s stat. p. 104.

among his other duties, is to 'read on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays some part of the Grammar of Theodorus or other approved Greek grammarian, together with some part of Isocrates, Lucian, or Philostratus; on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays he is to read Aristophanes, Theocritus, Euripides, Sophocles, Pindar, or Hesiod, or some other of the most ancient Greek poets, together with some portion of Demosthenes, Thucydides, Aristotle, Theophrastus, or Plutarch; on holidays, Homer, the Epigrams, or some passage from the divine Plato, or some Greek theologian'.¹

Greek is now, if I may use the expression, regularly established and endowed as a part of the higher education in England. It is recognized with equal emphasis in the great foundations of Christ Church and Trinity College, Cambridge; in Colet's noble institution, St. Paul's School; and to a great degree in the multitudinous grammar schools founded, some few years later, on the Pauline model.

To the men of this period Greek was a matter of supreme interest and importance. They were drawn to it as humanists by the treasures of literature, science, and philosophy that it contained; and they were drawn to it as theologians because it took them back to what they regarded as a purer and better form of Christian life and doctrine. Our English humanists accordingly—Grocyn, Linacre, Colet, More, Pace, and the rest—are all men of the same type as Erasmus: Reformers before the Reformation. There is nothing of the pagan spirit in our English Renaissance. And it seems to me, if I may venture to express an opinion, that we are apt to exaggerate the pagan character even of the Italian Renaissance. In the Latin literature of the Italian Renaissance there is

¹ Ward, p. 101.

no doubt a vein of pagan licentiousness, but one must not take this too seriously, as it is generally nothing more than a literary affectation. On the Greek side, however, there is very little of this ; there is nothing of it in Bessarion, or Pico della Mirandola, or Ficinus. And we must never forget that Aldus Manutius printed a collection of *Poetae Christiani*, and that among the very first of his greater undertakings was a project to give the world the real Bible in Hebrew and Greek, the original tongues.

At the time of the Reformation there was apparently a wide diffusion of the new learning in the upper classes in England. We all know how Ascham found Lady Jane Grey reading her Plato, and he tells us also that the Princess (afterwards Queen) Elizabeth read Isocrates, Sophocles, and the Greek Testament with him.

The one noteworthy fact in the history of the Greek learning of this period is the controversy as to the pronunciation of Greek at Cambridge. The older English Greek scholars had followed the modern Greek pronunciation—the pronunciation which they had learnt from their Italian and Greek teachers. Cheke, the Regius Professor, and his friend Thomas (afterwards Sir Thomas) Smith, came to the conclusion that this was radically wrong, and devoid of any historical or rational basis ; and they had arrived at this view, apparently, before they became aware that Erasmus had written a famous monograph on the subject. When the reformed pronunciation came to be adopted in practice, Gardiner, the Chancellor of the University, denounced the innovation in an edict threatening all innovators in the matter of pronunciation with the direst pains and penalties : even a schoolboy, who ventures to speak in the new way, is to be whipped for his ‘temerity’. The two chief offenders, though bowing to the Chancellor’s authority, drew up long and elaborate

replies ; that of Smith seems to me a model of scholarly argument and a wonderful production for that age. If the modern Greek (he argues) has lost so much of the grammar and vocabulary of the ancient tongue, can we suppose him to be much better in the matter of pronunciation ? His pronunciation is probably as degenerate as his language. And Smith undertakes to show that this is really the case, and that the evidence to be found in the classical writers themselves, as also that of the ancient grammarians, is sufficient to prove that the ancient pronunciation was very unlike that of the modern Greeks.

The Elizabethan age is almost a blank in the history of Greek learning in England. It produced a few translations—mostly of books bearing on matters of theological controversy—but there is hardly a trace in it of that large interest in Greek antiquity which characterized the humanists of the early part of the century.

Whatever the explanation may be, the situation changes when we come to James I's reign, and from that moment there is no dearth of distinguished names in the annals of English learning. To my mind one of the greatest of these names is that of Sir Henry Savile. Savile's Chrysostom is the outward and visible sign of a great revival of Greek studies in England ; but it is no adequate measure of what Savile did for English learning. More than one of the scholars of the next generation owed his inspiration to him ; and, as we are all bound to remember in this place, he founded the two Savilian chairs, and thus created the study of Greek mathematics in Oxford—a study which was long the special glory of this University. It was thus to Savile that we owe the Collection of the Greek Mathematicians of Wallis, and the Euclid of David Gregory.

In the generation immediately after Savile comes

Selden, a man of universal knowledge, whose distinction as a Greek scholar is apt to be overshadowed by his distinction as a jurist and as a Hebraist, so that we forget that he was the first editor of the *Marmor Parium*. But the great Greek scholar of the Caroline age is, I think, beyond a doubt Gataker, whose *Antoninus* is to this day a book of unquestioned value and authority.

In the second half of the seventeenth century we have in England a whole series of considerable Greek scholars : first of all Stanley, the editor of the first English edition of Aeschylus and the author of the first history of Greek philosophy in the English language ; then Pearson, Gale, Wallis, Hody, Mill, and Chilmead. Though they were none of them scholars of the first order, they compare very favourably with their contemporaries in France, Holland, and Germany. Germany seems to have been still suffering from the effects of the Thirty Years War ; France was no longer in touch with the Greek literature of the Classical period ; and the great Dutch school of Greek scholars had not yet come into existence.

The last product of the seventeenth century is Richard Bentley, and even in the entire history of European learning the world has never had but one Bentley.

It may be hard for us to realize, but the fact is that for centuries Greek was far behind Latin scholarship. The pre-Bentleian Greek scholars had as a rule been content to produce either Greek texts of a very rough-and-ready sort, or translations embodying the first ideas of interpretation or illustrative commentaries, either unsystematic in the form of *adversaria*, &c., or systematic like what we have in Casaubon's *Theophrastus* and *Athenaeus*. Hardly a man among them thought of going beyond this ; hardly a man among them felt that, in the interests of historic truth, the reconstruction and recovery of the

true text by sustained methodic criticism is the first duty of a critical scholar. Bentley saw this, and he was the first Greek scholar who had a clear perception of it.

We cannot judge him by the actual work he left behind him. A man of greater promise than performance, he conceived large ideas and great schemes, but he did not execute a tithe of what he projected: it was rather by showing how the work should be done, or by fruitful suggestions, or by active encouragement of others, that he has left his mark on Greek learning. For a whole century the scholars of England and Holland were working on Bentleian lines; and even at the present moment we are in more than one department of knowledge only doing—no doubt with a fuller equipment and greater fineness of method—that which Bentley indicated as the thing that had to be done.

Early in life Bentley conceived two great projects—a complete edition of the Greek lexicographers, and a new collection of the fragments of the Greek poets. The edition of the Lexicographers never came to anything; but Bentley's interest in them passed on to his successors, and there is hardly an English or Dutch scholar in the eighteenth century who is not known as a student and critic of the Greek lexicographers. Toup's chief work is on Suidas; Porson edited Photius; the Porsonians knew Hesychius by heart; but it was reserved for our own century to see as the final result of these studies in England the monumental work of Gaisford, his Suidas and his *Etymologicum Magnum*.

Bentley's chief work was on the Greek poets. What he could do for the poets was shown in his first work, his *Epistle to Mill*, written when he was just twenty-eight, but evincing a power and maturity which made foreigners see that a great scholar had arisen in England. In this,

and still more in his *Emendations to Menander*, all Bentley's great qualities are seen—a fine sense of metre and language, a logic at once acute and robust, a complete mastery over all the facts of critical moment. Looking at his emendations one may perhaps in these days think he had easy work before him. This is a mere illusion; he succeeded where Grotius and Casaubon had failed; he did what the greatest of his predecessors could not do.

Passing over his services to Aristophanes, to Nicander and Callimachus, I may remind you of what he did for Homer. His recognition of the digamma as a factor in Homeric language and versification is, I take it, one of the most important discoveries ever made by one man in classical philology—so much so that one can hardly imagine a philological investigation of Greek and its affinities without a due recognition of the digamma. Bentley was in this just a century in advance of his age; even Wolf had no idea of the value and significance of Bentley's discovery.

Bentley, in fact, was constantly in advance of his age; One has only to consider his place in the history of New Testament criticism. Before Bentley took the subject in hand, the utmost aim of scholars was to present the received text with a farrago of readings from MSS. of all ages and descriptions. Bentley's aim, on the contrary, was to restore the oldest knowable text—the text as it was at the time of the council of Nicaea; and he showed equal discernment in the choice of means; he proposed to restrict himself to the evidence of the oldest Greek MSS., supplemented by that of the Vulgate and certain Oriental versions of great antiquity. If Bentley had never done anything besides this, he might still claim to go down to posterity as the man who anticipated by a whole

century the work of Lachmann, Tregelles, and Westcott and Hort.

Bentley's chief interest, however, was in Greek poetry ; and the chief interest of his immediate successors also was in the Greek poets and the restoration of their texts. There were some among them, no doubt, notably John Taylor, and to a lesser degree Toup and Tyrwhitt, who devoted themselves to the great prose writers ; but the school of Bentley, if the expression may be hazarded, Markland, Dawes, Musgrave, Warton, and the rest, allowed itself to be absorbed in the study of the Greek poets. If I were asked who was the strong man and chief figure in this company, I should say with little hesitation, Richard Dawes. He left very little, one small volume of *Miscellanea* ; but our Greek grammars to this day have to consider his theories, and his book was a sort of breviary with Porson and the Porsonians. Even in our own time Professor Cobet of Leyden was able to say of it, that a new light broke in upon him when he first came across the *Miscellanea Critica* of Richard Dawes.

The end of the last century saw the rise of Porson and the Porsonian school of Greek scholars. These men, in the direction their studies take, as also in many other characteristics, are essentially disciples of Dawes and Bentley ; but it seems to me that we must also recognize in their work a certain influence from the great Dutch school. Unlike Bentley, Porson is rarely guilty of a crude or hasty suggestion, or of tampering with a passage which is not clearly and demonstrably corrupt. He is, in fact, a model of caution and patience, not an impetuous genius like Bentley or Dawes.

Porson is now mainly known as one who settled the canons of the Greek trimeter, and as the author of certain emendations which appear in our editions of the Greek

dramatists. He was really a much larger man than this estimate implies. What he might have done for Greek learning at Cambridge, if he had been allowed to lecture and devote himself, as seriously as he himself wished, to the duties of his chair, it is impossible to say ; as it was, however, he certainly created a school, creating it by the only means left to him, by books and articles, by personal intercourse and correspondence. So far from being a man of narrow interests, he was a remarkably well-read man : he was a student of Plato, at a time when Plato was little read in England ; he was quite at home in the study of inscriptions ; when advice was wanted on a matter connected with the Herculanean papyri, Tyrwhitt declared that Porson was the only man in England qualified to give an opinion. And of his one contribution to learned theology, his Reply to Travis, Gibbon was able to say that it was ' the most acute and accurate piece of criticism since the days of Bentley '.

The Porsonian school, Blomfield, Monk, and Elmsley, if I may include him among them, continued Porson's work on the dramatists, though with little of Porson's freshness or felicity of touch. If the mantle of the master descended on any one, it was rather on Dobree, who brought some of the best qualities of the Porson school to bear on the text and language of the Greek orators. I may add that Dobree's *Adversaria* have had the almost unique distinction of being reprinted within the last twenty years in Germany. The last representative of the school was, I suppose, the late Charles Badham, who died some five years ago in Australia ; and it is significant of the state of English opinion that he was more valued in Holland and Germany than in his own country.

Notwithstanding their great merits, there was, it must be admitted, a certain insularity and narrowness in the

men of the Porson school. Absorbed in the technique of metre and language, they neglected interpretation, and the collateral studies which bear on interpretation ; they had no idea of philology in the large sense in which Boeckh and Ottfried Müller understood the term. As soon as this came to be felt, a new direction of studies became inevitable. So far as the Universities are concerned, the reaction had already set in in 1830, when Thirlwall and his friends were labouring to give a wider and more liberal character to Cambridge studies. From that moment, and for the next thirty years, the tendency of all that was most striking and distinguished in English learning was towards history, and the historical interpretation of antiquity and ancient literature. No one can regret a movement that gave us such works as the *Histories* of Grote and Thirlwall, and Arnold's *Thucydides* ; but it is impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact that the new learning tended to drive out the old learning, and that we lost to some extent our ancient reputation for severe and exact critical scholarship.

As the present is not a good judge of the present, I need not speak of the more recent forms and phases of Greek learning in this country. Nor will I venture on a forecast of the future of Greek learning, or speculate as to the conditions under which it will be allowed to survive, or the directions which it may take. These matters belong to the politician and the prophet, and I personally cannot claim to be either of these. But I may perhaps plead privilege and say just one word to those who are seriously minded to give some portion of their lives and thoughts to classical studies. Success in these studies—I mean, of course, legitimate success, the success which is a credit, and creditably won—depends quite as much on the morality as on the intellectual aptitude of the student.

It implies amongst other things a love of knowledge for its own sake, a power of sacrificing the present to the future, a renunciation of petty interests and distractions. I will not essay a sketch of the personality of the ideal student ; the whole duty of the scholar is assuredly a very large and complex subject ; but without any attempt at being exhaustive, I think it may not be inopportune to note two points as unquestionably characteristic of the true scholar :

1. He has to take more thought of quality than of quantity in his work ; he does not seek to make an imposing demonstration.

2. He has to avoid all parade of learning, and not only this but also paradox, the parade of cleverness ; there is a certain sincerity, caution, modesty, and reserve in his thoughts, as well as in his utterances.

Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest

is a rule for him, as it is for all wise and reasonable men of the world also.

